



Ambassador's Activities

2012

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Speech by *HE* Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at a lunch hosted by
the Leader of Leeds City Council, Keith Wakefield

Leeds, 8 March 2012

Councillor,
Honorary Consul,
President of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In a context of great Franco-British friendship marked by our joint intervention in Libya last year and our very successful Franco-British summit on 17 February, and with the emphasis on our cooperation in the fields of both nuclear energy and defence, it's a pleasure to be here in your city with a large delegation of French businesses from the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain.

It's an honour for me to attend this lunch today in Leeds, in the presence of the Leader and senior members of Leeds City Council and the Leeds Local Partnership. I also welcome the presence of prominent company directors from Leeds, but also of French company directors who have come to meet their British opposite numbers.

I'd like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Leader of the Council for his welcome. A big thank you, too, to the Franco-British Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which is behind this initiative, as well as to Veolia, which agreed to sponsor this day. You're all providing us today with a unique opportunity to get to know this city better: its economic attractiveness but also its cultural and academic influence.

Indeed – contrary to both our countries' centralizing traditions – I'm determined that France's action in the United Kingdom shouldn't be confined to London. It's true that, in this globalized era, a nation's dynamism is measured partly on the basis of its main metropolis, but it's equally crucial that large, modern and prosperous cities should pick up the capital's baton in the regions, providing a rich and balanced network across the country.

We must respond to this “demand for France” wherever in the UK it is expressed. And that's why, having been appointed French Ambassador to this country less than a year ago, it's the second time I've come to Yorkshire and to Leeds in particular. Last October I had the pleasure of delivering a lecture on Franco-British cooperation in the era of the Arab Spring to an audience of about 100 French-speaking students at the University of Leeds, with whom the

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discussion was lively and animated. I'd previously taken part in a very moving ceremony in York in tribute to the French air force personnel based in that city who had fought in the Second World War.

The emphasis of today's second visit is on economic relations. I know fruitful discussions have already taken place this morning about Leeds' prospects for development in the business field. Today is in fact an opportunity for the companies in the delegation to forge links and find out more about investment opportunities in this city.

An attractive city if ever there was one. Leeds is the UK's third city (1), not only in terms of its population of more than 700,000 but also in terms of the number of companies based here. It's also a remarkable example of economic redevelopment, because it's gone from a mining and manufacturing tradition to being, today, the UK's largest centre outside London for financial services and services to companies. It's also a future hub for medical and environmental technologies, but also the digital industry, to mention only a few sectors.

France already contributes to its dynamism in a way that can't be overlooked. Forty-one French companies are known to have a presence in Leeds. France is the third-largest investor in terms of the number of projects in the region of Yorkshire and the Humber. Since 1995, our investments have led to the creation of nearly 5,000 jobs. I have no doubt that today will spark numerous initiatives enabling us to increase significantly our contribution to the economic development of the city and region.

This afternoon's programme should also – if there were any need – persuade you of Leeds' attractiveness.

Commercial attractiveness first of all, which should be illustrated by our visit to the city's future shopping centre, Trinity Leeds, one of the biggest projects currently under way in the UK, which will house nearly 120 businesses and reinforce the city's reputation as the "Knightsbridge of the north". I need only mention the French Embassy's address in London – 58 Knightsbridge, a stone's throw from Harrods and Harvey Nichols – for you to realize that I'm not using that description lightly...

Cultural and academic attractiveness too, as will be confirmed this afternoon by our visit to the fine Leeds Arena project and the University of Leeds. But I'll expand on these aspects this evening, at the reception hosted by the Lord Mayor at the City Museum, in the presence of – among others – figures from Leeds' cultural and academic world.

In the meantime, thank you for listening and for helping make today a success./.